

Conservation and Subcommittee #5
Budget Proposal – Commission on Culture & Tourism
Tuesday February 17, 2009
6:30pm Public Hearing Testimony

Good evening. My name is Matt Pugliese, I'm the managing director of Oddfellows Playhouse. Oddfellows Playhouse is a not for profit youth theatre located in Middletown. Our mission is to promote the growth of young people in skills, knowledge and self-confidence, through the performing arts. We have been in existence for 34 years, and the Commission of Culture and Tourism has been a funder and partner in our mission since 1989.

Oddfellows Playhouse, arts organizations, and the people of the State of Connecticut need the Commission on Culture and Tourism to remain an independent agency. The recommendation in Governor Rell's proposed budget to consolidate the CCT into the Department of Economic and Community Development will save the state in the short term and have long term repercussions.

The CCT is important to the State because:

- It provides advocate within the state government, focused specifically on the arts.
- It provides much needed financial support to arts organizations, allowing them to enrich our community, our hearts and minds.
- The CCT serves as a partner with the National Endowment of the Arts to bring federal funds into the state of Connecticut.

Since 1989, the CCT has been critical to Oddfellows Playhouse's ability to provide services, and work towards the betterment of young people. The CCT focuses on the impact of art on the citizens of Connecticut. The financial support of the CCT allows Oddfellows to provide performing arts classes to at risk youth in Middletown at little to no cost.

Last year, the CCT provided a pilot grant for our Arts Explorers program, a multi-organizational partnership across Middletown, serving at risk middle school students. In only its first year, the measurable outcomes from this program far exceed expectations. Without the CCT, Oddfellows Playhouse would have been unable to leverage enough private funding to run the program.

As a nonprofit manager, I understand the need to eliminate expenses. I am navigating the same difficult track. I'm asking you to consider your role as stewards of our state. We need to consider the long term outcomes of this decision, and not only the immediate financial savings.

- What type of cultural environment do we want to create in Connecticut?
- Will changes in grant structures cripple our organizations?
- Will the lack of a specific state arts agency impact the amount of money the state receives from the National Endowment for the arts?
- Will the new Department of Economic and Community development consider the aesthetic artistic elements or only be focused on financial profitability and job creation?
- Will commercial viability replace artistic integrity as the deciding factor in funding?
- What happens to the rich cultural fabric of our state when it becomes convenient to no longer fund art?